

TRICARE Europe

Release

"Your passport to quality health"

Phone: (DSN) 496-6315 (Comm.) 06302-67-6315

International: 00-49-6302-67-6315

Email: teopao@europe.tricare.osd.mil

Web: www.europe.tricare.osd.mil

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Contact: Troy Kitch

Beneficiary Needs Remain Top Priority with Retirement of Medical Transport Aircraft

The retirement of the U.S. Air Force's C-9 Nightingale Aeromedical Evacuation aircraft this month will lead to changes in medical travel, but TRICARE beneficiaries can expect continued access to quality health care. These changes will not affect TRICARE Europe benefits. There are still many different ways for beneficiaries to receive routine, priority, or emergency care in Europe.

For routine care, local MTF staffs will work with patients to determine the best available care options. In some cases, patients who need certain types of routine care may be authorized to travel to larger MTFs via military or commercial air or ground transportation. In other cases, patients who need routine care that is locally available may be referred to members of TRICARE Europe's Preferred Provider Network (PPN). How and where a patient will be treated will be managed on a case-by-case basis by local MTF staffs in collaboration with patients and their families.

The quality of care offered by host nation PPN members is absolutely comparable to the care that U.S. doctors provide, according to Air Force Col. (Dr.) James Rundell, TRICARE Europe Executive Director. Over the past year, TRICARE Europe has worked hard to optimize the quality of care provided by the PPN, and the network has been comprehensively analyzed to ensure it can meet the needs of TRICARE Europe beneficiaries when the C-9 retires, he said.

"We expect the impact of the C-9 divestiture to be minimal. This is because of our network adequacy analysis and because many MTFs have already been using host nation providers with more frequency in recent months due to ongoing contingencies and deployments," Rundell said, "We have over 8,000 members in the PPN throughout Europe who augment the military healthcare system year round — and we consistently get excellent feedback from beneficiaries about the care they receive from these members. The retirement of the C-9 will not change the excellent health care services that our beneficiaries expect."

While the health care experience in a host nation clinic or hospital may not be exactly the same as in the U.S., Rundell stressed that the providers in the TRICARE Europe PPN are fully qualified, quality medical

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providers. TRICARE Service Center staff members and Patient Liaisons are also available to help bridge cultural and language gaps. These personnel understand the local culture and clinical practice environment and can help beneficiaries better understand their experience when referred to a host nation provider.

“Facilities and processes may be different than many of us may be used to,” Rundell said, “But living with cultural differences is part of serving overseas. Our goal at TRICARE Europe is that you receive quality outcomes of care.”

TRICARE Europe continually monitors the quality of care provided by host nation providers in the PPN to ensure beneficiaries receive the best possible care. TRICARE Europe’s quality monitoring program is based on the best network quality monitoring practices used by MTFs theater-wide.

“We constantly gather data about each provider in our PPN from patient surveys and other feedback tools,” he said, “ We use that data to make decisions about the future development of the PPN program. At this point, our PPN program is more robust than it has ever been. If you are referred ‘downtown’ for care, we want you to know that you are in good hands.”

TRICARE Europe’s quality monitoring program also helps to ensure that each member of the PPN continues to meet high standards of care. If an MTF finds that a provider is not meeting standards, they have the option to discontinue the PPN agreement with that member. TRICARE Europe’s PPN ‘membership’ agreements are reviewed for renewal on an ongoing, regular basis.

“The members of our PPN represent the best-available host nation providers in Europe, Africa, and the Middle East,” Rundell said, “We’re proud of the relationships we have with providers around Europe, and we’re confident that our beneficiaries will be satisfied with the care they receive.”

It is very important that beneficiaries complete patient customer comment cards to assist TRICARE Europe and the military MTF monitor quality of care. TRICARE Europe centrally collects patient feedback to look for trends and patterns that will help MTFs identify and best use the highest quality providers.

For more information on the TRICARE Europe Preferred Provider Network, see www.europe.tricare.osd.mil or stop by your local TRICARE Service Center. Beneficiaries may learn more about medical travel changes resulting from the retirement of the C-9 from their local MTF.

Editor’s Note: contact TRICARE Europe for queries regarding the TRICARE Europe Preferred Provider Network. If you have questions about the retirement of the C-9 aircraft in Europe, please contact USAFE Public Affairs at DSN 480-6558 or commercial +49-6371-47-5558.